

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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THE ROSE AND THE KEY.

CHAPTER VIII. WYBOURNE CHURCHYARD.

In a golden mist he lost her; but he does not despair. Mr. Marston pursues. Has he any very clear idea why?

If he had overtaken the ladies, as he expected, at Llanberris, would he have ventured, of his own mere notion, to accompany them on their after-journey? Certainly not. What, then, is the meaning of this pursuit? What does he mean to do or say?

He has no plan. He has no set speech or clear idea to deliver. He is in a state of utter confusion. He only knows that see her once more he must—that he can't endure the thought of letting her go, thus, for ever from his sight; she is never for a moment out of his head.

I don't know what his grave experienced servant thought of their mysterious whirl to Chester by the night mail. He did not refer it, I dare say, to anything very wise or good. But the relation of man and master is, happily, military, and the servant's conscience is acquitted when he has obeyed his orders.

The fog has melted into clearest air, and the beautiful moon is shining.

What a world of romance, and love, and beauty he thinks it, as he looks out of the open window on the trees and mountains that sail by in that fairy light.

The distance is shortening. Everything near and far is good of its kind. Everything is interesting. It is like the ecstasy of the opium-eater. Never were such stars, and hedges, and ditches. What an exquisite little church, and tombstones! Requiescat in pace! What a beautiful ash-tree! Heaven bless it! How picturesque

that horse's head, poking out through the hole in the wall with the ivy on it! And those pigs, lying flat on the manure-heap, jolly, odd creatures! How delightfully funny they are! And even when he draws his head in, and leans back for a moment in his place, he thinks there is something so kindly and jolly about that fat old fellow with the travelling-cap and the rugs, who snores with his chin on his chest—a stock-broker, perhaps. What heads and ledgers!—wonderful fellows! The valves and channels through which flows into its myriad receptacles the incredible and restless wealth of Britain. Or, perhaps, a merchant, princely, benevolent. Well that we have such a body, the glory of England.

The fat gentleman utters a snort, wakes up, looks at his watch, and produces a tin sandwich-box.

That thin elderly lady in black, that sits at the left of the fat gentleman, who is champing his sandwiches, does not see things, with her sunken eyes, as Mr. Marston sees them. She is gliding on to her only darling at school, who lies in the sick-house in scarlatina.

They are now but half an hour from Chester. Mr. Marston is again looking out of the window as they draw near.

"Maud Guendoline," he is repeating again. "Guendoline—an odd surname, but so beautiful. Foreign, is it? I never heard it before. When we get into Chester I'll have the Army List, and the London Directory, and every list of names they can make me out. It may help me. Who knows?"

They are in Chester. Oh, that it were not so big a place! His servant is looking after his luggage. He is in the ticket-office, making futile inquiries after "an

old lady, Miss Max, who left Bangor for Chester that very evening, and forgot something of importance, and I would gladly pay any one a reward who could give me a clue to find her by. I am sure only that she was to go via Chester."

No; they could tell him nothing. But if it was via Chester, she was going on by one of the branches. The clerk who might have written the new labels for her luggage was not on duty till to-morrow afternoon, having leave till two. "He's very sharp; if 'twas he did it—Max is a queer name—he'll be like to remember it; that is, he may."

Here was hope, but hope deferred. The people at Llanberris had told him that the label which he had picked up was the only one on which the name of the place was written, on which account it was removed, and all the rest were addressed simply "Chester." He has nothing for it but patience.

There is a pretty little town called Wybourne, not very far from a hundred miles away. Next evening, the church-bell, ringing the rustics to evening service, has sounded its sweet note over the chimneys of the town, through hedge-rows and bosky hollows, over slope and level, and Mr. Marston, with the gritty dust of the railway still on his hat, has tapped in the High-street at the post-office wooden window-pane, and converses with grave and plaintive Mrs. Fisher.

"Can you tell me if a lady named Miss Guendoline lives anywhere near this?" he inquires.

"Guendoline? No, sir. But there's Mr. and Mrs. Gwyn, please, that lives down the street near the Good Woman."

"No, thanks; that's not it. Miss Maud Guendoline."

Mrs. Fisher put an unheard question to an invisible interlocutor in the interior, and made answer: "No, sir; please there's no such person."

"I beg pardon; but just one word more. Does a lady named Max—a Miss Max—live anywhere near this place?"

"Miss Max? I think not, sir."

"You're not quite sure, I think?" says he, brightening, as he leans on the little shelf outside the window; and if his head would have fitted through the open pane, he would, I think, in his eagerness, have popped it into Mrs. Fisher's front parlour.

Again Mrs. Fisher consulted the inaudible oracle.

"No, sir; we don't receive no letters here for no person of that name," she replied.

The disappointment in the young man's handsome face touched Mrs. Fisher's gentle heart.

"I'm very sorry, indeed, sir. I wish very much we could a' gave you any information," she says, through the official aperture.

"Thank you very much," he answers, desolately. "Is there any other post-office near? Do the people send a good way to you—about what distance round?"

"Well, the furthest, I think, will be Mr. Wyke's, of Wykhampton, about four miles."

"Is there any name at all like Max, Miss Max, an old lady? I should be so extremely—I can't tell you—so very grateful." He pleads, in his extremity, "Do, do, pray ask."

She turned and consulted the unknown once more.

"There is no one—that is, no surname—here, sir, at all like Max. There's an old lady lives near here, but it can't be her. She's Miss Maximilla Medwyn."

"Maximilla? Is she an old lady?"

"Yes sir."

"Thin?"

"She is, sir." And Mrs. Fisher begins to wonder at the ardour of his inquiries, and to look at him very curiously.

"Has she been from home lately?"

"I think she was." (Here she again consults her unseen adviser.) "Yes, sir; she returned only last night."

"And where does she live, pray? In the town here—near this?" he pursues.

"In the Hermitage, please, sir; any one you meet will show it you. It is just at the end of the town. But she'll be in church at present."

"And how soon do you think it will be over—how soon will the people be coming out?"

"In about half an hour, sir."

And so, with many acknowledgments on his part, and no little surprise and conjecture on that of sedate Mrs. Fisher, who wondered what could have fired this young gentleman so about old Miss Medwyn, the conference ends, and in ten minutes more, in a somewhat less dusty state, he presents himself at the open gate of the churchyard, and reconnoitres.

Over the graves in faint gusts peals the muffled swell of the organ, and the sound of voices, sweetly and sadly, like psalmody from another world. He looks up to the gilded hand of the clock in the ivied tower, and conjectures that this must be the holy

song that precedes the sermon. Devotly he wishes the pulpit orator a quick deliverance.

He, on the whole, wisely resolves against going into the church, and, being provided with a seat, perhaps in some corner of difficult egress, whence, if he should see the objects of his pursuit, he might not be able to make his way out in time without a fuss.

At length, with a flutter at his heart, he sees the hats and bonnets begin to emerge from the porch. Taking his stand beside the gate, he watches. Not a single Christian in female garb escapes him. He sees the whole congregation pour itself out, and waits till the very dregs and sediment drop forth. Those who pray, in formâ pauperis, and draw a weekly dividend out of the poors' box: old Mrs. Milders, with the enormous black straw bonnet, and the shaking head and hand; Bill Hopkins, lame of a leg, who skips slowly down on a crutch; and Tom Buz-zard, blind of both eyes, a pock-marked object of benevolence, with his chin high in the air, and a long cudgel in his hand, with which he taps the curbstone, and now and then the leg of a passenger who walks the street forgetful of the blind.

The clerk comes forth demurely with a black bag, such as lawyers carry their briefs in. There is no good, Mr. Marston thinks, in waiting for the sexton.

He joins the clerk, compliments him on his church and organ, asks whether Miss Maximilla Medwyn was in church—(yes, she was)—and where the house called the Hermitage is to be found.

"You may go by the road, sir," said the clerk, "or by the path, which you'll find it shorter. Take the first stile to your right, when you turn the corner."

Alas! what is the meaning of this walk to the Hermitage? Miss Medwyn was in church; and could he not swear that, in the review just ended, he had seen distinctly every female face and figure in the congregation as it "marched past?" His Miss Max was assuredly not among them; and she and Miss Medwyn, therefore, were utterly distinct old women—ah, well-a-day!

He crosses the stile. The path traverses a narrow strip of meadow, the air is odorous with little dishevelled cocks of hay, mown only the day before; the spot cloistered in by very old and high hawthorn hedges, is silent with a monastic melancholy.

He sighs more pleasantly as he enters this fragrant solitude; beyond the stile at the other side, is the gloom of tall old trees. He is leaving the world behind him.

Butterflies are hovering up and down, along the hedge, at the sunny side of the field. A bee booms by as he stands on the second stile; it is the only sound he hears except the faint chirp of the grasshopper. He descends upon that pleasant dark-green grass that grows in shade.

Here is another field, long and narrow, silent and more gloomy than the first. Up the steep, a giant double row of lime-trees stretches, marking the line of the avenue, now carpeted over with thick grass, of the old manor-house of Wybourne, some walls and stone-shafted windows of which, laden with ivy, and canopied by ancient trees, crown the summit. The western sun throws long dim shadows down the slope. A thick underwood straggles among the trunks of the lordly timber, and here and there a gap leaves space, in which these patriarchal trees shake their branches free, and spread a wider shadow.

In this conventual obscurity, scarcely fifty steps up the gentle slope, he sees Miss Maud, Maud Guendoline, or whatever else her name may be, standing in her homely dress. She is looking toward him, no doubt recognises him, although she makes no sign. His heart thumps wildly once or twice. He is all right again in a moment. He quickens his pace. He is near enough to see her features distinctly. She looks a little grave, he thinks, as he raises his hat.

Here is a tall fellow, great in a town-and-gown row, full of pluck, cool as marble in danger, very much unnerved at this moment, and awfully afraid of this beautiful and slender girl.

CHAPTER IX. THE YOUNG LADY SPEAKS.

"I'm so glad, I'm so charmed—how extremely lucky I am! I had not the least hope of this. And you have made your journey quite safely?"

As he makes this little confession and inquiry, his brown handsome face and large eyes are radiant with happiness.

"Safely! oh, yes, my cousin and I are old travellers, and we never lose our way or our luggage. I am waiting here for her; she is paying a visit to—I really forget his name, farmer something or other, an old friend of hers, down there; you can see the smoke of his chimney over the hedge,"

said the young lady, indicating the direction.

"And you're not fatigued?"

"Oh, no! thanks."

"And Miss Max quite well, I hope?" he adds, recollecting her right to an inquiry.

"Miss Max is very well, thanks," said the young lady.

Had she blushed when she saw him? Was there not a gentle subsidence in the brilliant tint with which she met him? He thought her looking more beautiful than ever.

"I dare say you are glad to find yourself at home again?" says he, not knowing what exactly to say next.

She glanced at him as if she suspected a purpose in his question.

"Some people have no place they can call a home, and some who have are not glad to find themselves there. I'm not at home, and I'm not sorry," she said, ever so little bitterly.

"There is a great deal of melancholy in that," he said, in a lower tone, as if he would have been very glad to be permitted to sympathise. "Away from home, and yet no wish to return. Isn't it a little cruel, too?"

"Melancholy or cruel, it happily concerns no one but myself," she said, a little haughtily.

"Everything that can possibly concern your happiness concerns me," said the young man, audaciously.

She looked for a moment offended and even angry, but "a change came o'er the spirit of her dream," and she smiled as if a little amused.

"You seem, Mr. Marston, to give away your sympathy on very easy terms—you must have mistaken what I said. It was no confidence. It was spoken, as people in masks tell their secrets, and further because I don't care if all the world knew it. How can you tell that I either desire or deserve pity; yours, or any other person's? You know absolutely nothing of me."

"I'm too impetuous; it is one of my many faults. Other fellows, wiser men, get on a thousand times better, and I have laid myself open to your reproof, and—and—disdain, by my presumption, by my daring to speak exactly as I feel. It is partly this, that the last three days—they say that happy days seem very short—I don't know how it is, I suppose I'm different from every one else; but this day, yesterday, and to-day, seem to me like three weeks; I feel as if I had known you ever so long—"

"And yet you know nothing about me, not even my name," said the young lady, smiling on the grass near her pretty foot, and poking at a daisy with the tip of her parasol, and making its little head nod this way and that.

"I do know your name—I beg pardon, but I do; I heard Miss Max call you Maud, and I learned quite accidentally your second name yesterday."

Miss Maud looks at him from under her dark lashes suddenly. Her smile has vanished now; she looks down again; and now it returns darkly.

"I do upon my honour, I learned it at Llanberris yesterday," he repeated.

"Oh! then you *did* go to Llanberris; and you did not disdain to cross-examine the people about us, and to try to make out that which you supposed we did not wish to disclose?"

"You are very severe," he began, a good deal abashed.

"I'm very merciful, on the contrary," she said bitterly; "if I were not—but no matter. I think I can conjecture who was your informant. You made the acquaintance of a person blind of one eye, who is a detective, or a spy, or a villain of some sort, and you pumped him. Somehow, I did not think before that a gentleman was quite capable of that sort of thing."

"But, I give you my honour, I did nothing of the kind." He pleads earnestly. "I saw no such person, I do assure you."

"You shall answer my questions, then," she said as imperiously as a spoiled child; "and, first, will you speak candidly? Will you be upon honour, in no one particular, wilfully to deceive me?"

"You are the last person on earth I should deceive, upon any subject, Miss Guendoline—I hope you believe me."

"Well, why did you go to Llanberris?"

"I had hopes," he answered with a little embarrassment, "of overtaking you and Miss Max—and I—I hoped, also, that perhaps you would permit me to join in your walk—that was my only reason."

"Now, tell me my name?" said the young lady, suddenly changing her line of examination.

"Your name is, I believe—I think, you are, Miss Maud Guendoline," he answered.

She smiled again darkly at the daisy she was busy tapping on the head.

"Miss Maud Guendoline," she repeated very low; and she laughed a little to herself.

"Maud and Guendoline are two Chris-

tian names," she said. "Do you really believe that I have no surname; or perhaps you believe that either of these is my surname? I need not have told you, but I do, that neither of these is the least like it. And now, why have you come here? Have you any real business here?"

"You are a very cruel inquisitor," he says, with a very real wince. "Is there any place where an idle man may not find himself, without well knowing why? Is your question quite fair?"

"Is your answer quite frank? Do you quite remember your promise? If we are not to part this moment, you must answer without evasion."

This young lady, in serge, spoke as haughtily as if she were a princess in a fairy-tale.

"Well, as you command me, I will, I will, indeed. I—I believe I came here, very much—entirely, indeed, from the same motive that led me to Llanberis. I could not help it, I couldn't, upon my honour! I hope you are not very angry."

It is not usual to be constrained to speak, in matters of this kind, the literal truth; and I question if the young man was ever so much embarrassed in all his days.

"Mr. Marston," she said, very quietly, he fancied a little sadly, "you are, I happen to know, a person of some rank, and likely to succeed to estates, and a title—don't answer, I *know* this to be so, and I mention it only by way of preface. Now, suppose I pull off my glove, and show you a seamstress's finger, dotted all over with the needle's point; suppose I fill in what I call my holiday by hard work with my pencil and colour-box; suppose, beside all this, I have troubles enough to break the spirits of the three merriest people you know; and suppose that I have reasons for preventing any one, but Miss Max, from knowing where I am, or suspecting who I am, don't you think there is enough in my case to make you a little ashamed of having pried and followed as you are doing?"

"You wrong me—oh, *indeed*, you wrong me! You won't say that; I did, perhaps, wrong. I may have been impertinent; but the meanness of prying, you *won't* think it! All I wanted was to learn where you had gone: my crime is in following you. I did not intend that you should think I had followed. I hoped it might appear like accident. If you knew how I dread your contempt, and how I respect you, and how your reproof pains me, I am sure you would think differently, and forgive me."

I don't think there could have been more deference in his face and tones if he had been pleading before an empress.

The young lady's dark eyes for a moment looked full at him, and again down upon the little daisy at her foot; and she drew some odd little circles round it as she looked, and I think there was ever so slight a brightening of her colour while the end of her parasol made these tiny diagrams.

If a girl be only beautiful enough, and her beauty of the refined type, it is totally impossible, be her position, her dress, her associates what they may, to connect the idea of vulgarity with her. There is nothing she does or means that is not elegant. Be she what she may, and you the most conceited dog on earth, there is a superiority in her of which your inward nature is conscious, and if you see her winnowing barley, as honest Don Quixote said of his mistress, the grains are undoubtedly pearls.

Mr. Marston, in the influence of this beauty, was growing more and more wild and maudlin every moment.

"The world's all wrong," he said, vehemently; "it is always the best and the noblest that suffer most; and you say you have troubles, and you don't disdain to work, and are not ashamed of it; and I admired and respected you before, and I've learned to honour you to-day. You talk of rank: of course, there are things in its favour—some things; but there are ever so many more against it. I have little to boast even of that, and I never was so happy as when I knew nothing about it. People are always happy, I am sure, in proportion as the idea of it fades from their minds. There is but one thing worth living for—and, oh, Heaven, how I wish I were worthy of you!"

"Now, Mr. Marston, you are talking like a madman. There must be no more of that," she said, in earnest.

"I spoke the truth, straight from my heart. I believe that is always madness."

"I like truth pretty well. I speak it more boldly than most girls, I believe. But I quite agree with you, whenever one is noble one is inevitably foolish. I'm not very old, but I have heard a good deal of romantic talk in my time, as every girl does, and I despise it. It doesn't even embarrass me. If we are to talk till my cousin, Miss Max, comes back, do let it be reasonably; I shall tire of it instantly on any other terms."

"When you told me to speak truth, just

now, you did not think so," says he, a little bitterly.

"Why can't you speak to me, for a few minutes, as you would to a friend? You talked just now about rank as if it should count for nothing. I don't agree with you. It is no illusion, but a cruelly hard fact. If I were the sort of girl who could like any one—I mean, make a fool of myself and fall in love—that person must be exactly of my own rank, neither above nor below it. The man who stoops is always sorry for it too late; and if he is like me, he would always think he was chosen, not for himself, but for his wealth or his title. Now, if I suspected that, it would make my house a jail, every hour of my life ghastly, my very self odious to me. It would make me utterly wicked; bad enough to be jealous of a human rival, though death may remove that. But to be jealous of your own circumstances, to know that you were nothing in the heart of your beloved, and they everything; that they had duped you; that your wooing was an imposture, and your partner a phantom. That anything like that should be my lot, Heaven forbid! It never shall. But were I a man, and found it so, I should load a pistol, and lie, soon enough, in my last straight bed."

"Only think how cruel and impossible this is," he said, gently, looking into her face. "I ask you to be reasonable, and consider the consequences of your pitiless theory. As to wealth, isn't there always some inequality—and do you mean that an artificial social distinction should throw asunder for ever two people——"

"I mean to say this—I ought to beg your pardon for interrupting you, but I speak for myself—if I were a man, I could never trust the love of the woman who, being immensely poorer than I, and in an inferior place in life, consented to marry me. I never could; and the more I loved her the worse it would be."

"We are all lawgivers and law-breakers," says he.

"I'm not, for one; I observe, at least, my own precepts; and so resolved, I shall never either love or marry."

He looked at her sadly; he looked down. Even this was more tolerable than if she had said she could neither love nor marry him.

"I wish, God knows, that I could rule my heart so," he said, sadly.

"Every one who pleases can. There are good nuns and good monks. It is a matter of will and of situation. Man or girl, it

is all the same; if they know they can't marry, and have a particle of reason, they see that liking and loving, except in the way of common goodwill, is not for them. They resist that demon Asmodeus, or Cupid, or call him how you please, and he troubles them no more."

"How can you talk so cruelly?" he says.

There is pain in every line of his handsome face, in the vexed light of the eyes that gaze so piercingly on her, in the uneasy grasp of his hand that leans upon the rough bark of the great tree which her shoulder touches lightly.

CHAPTER X. FAREWELL.

As men who, in stories, have fallen in love with phantoms, Marston feels, alas! he is now in love with a beautiful image of apathy. Is the great gulf really between them, and he yearning for the impossible?

"If by any sacrifice I could ever make myself the least worthy of you; if you could even like me ever so little——"

She laughed, but not unkindly.

"If I liked you, or were at all near liking you, you should know it by a certain sign," she says, with a smile, though a sad one.

"How? Do tell me how—how I should know it?" And he works off a great piece of the old bark with his sinewy hand as he talks.

"By my instantly leaving you," she answered. "And now we have talked sufficiently, haven't we, on this interesting theme? One day or other you'll say, if, by chance, you remember this talk under the ruins of Wybourne, 'That wise but threadbare young lady was right, and I was wrong, and it is very well there was some prudent person near to save me from an irreparable folly;' and having made this prediction, and said my say on what seems to me a very simple question, the subject is, for me, exhausted, and becomes a bore, and nothing shall tempt me to say or listen to another word upon it. What a sudden curious fog there was yesterday evening!"

Mr. Marston talked of the fog, as well as he was able, and of the old city of Chester, and whatever else this young lady pleased; he was hardly half thinking of these themes. His mind was employed, in an undercurrent, upon far more interesting matter.

"Suffering," he thinks, "is the parent of

all that is fine in character. This girl thinks, resolves, and acts for herself. How different she is from the youthful daughters of luxury! What originality—what energy—what self-reliance!”

Perhaps he is right. This young lady has a will of her own; she is a little eccentric; she thinks, without much knowledge of the world, very resolutely for herself. I don't know that she is more jealous than other women. But she is an imperious little princess.

While she is trifling in this cruel way, Miss Max comes through a little gate in the hedge at the foot of this sloping field. Urged apparently by the shortness of the time that remained, the young gentleman made one other venture.

“And do you mean to say, Miss Maud, that you, for instance, could never love a man whose rank you thought above your own?”

This was a rather abrupt transition from Carl Maria von Weber, about whose music the young lady was talking.

“You don't keep treaties, it seems,” said the young lady; “but as only two or three minutes remain, and we may never meet again, I'll answer you. Yes, perhaps I could. All the more readily for his superiority, all the more deeply for his sacrifices. But in some of my moods, vain or ambitious, I might marry him without caring a pin about him. There are the two cases, and I am never likely to be tempted by either, and—pray, let me say the rest—if I were, no one should ever suspect it, and I should, assuredly, accept neither.”

“You said we were never likely to meet again,” said the young man. “Is that kind? What have I done to deserve so much severity?”

He glanced down the slope. Miss Max was toiling up. She was stumbling over the twisted roots that spread under the great trees, and seeing a man conversing with her young cousin, she had put up her parasol to keep the slanting sunlight from her eyes, and aid her curious scrutiny.

She could not reach them well in less than four minutes more.

Four minutes still. Precious interval.

“You go to the ball at Wymering?” she asked in a tone that had something odd in it; a strange little sigh, and yet how much apathy.

“Anywhere—yes, certainly,” he replies, in hot haste. “Is there a chance—the least hope?”

He remembered that she was not a very

likely person to figure at a ball, and so he ended, “I have often intended going there; any hope of your being in the neighbourhood of Wymering about that time?”

“You see, I don't pretend to be a great person. No fairy has bedizened me for an occasion. I have no magnificence to dissolve at a fated hour,” she said, with a sad little laugh. “Those balls are not such ill-natured things after all. They help poor girls who work at their needles. Yes, I always go to that, at least as far as the cloak-room.”

“Wherever you go, Miss Maud, there will be no one like you; no one like you, anywhere, in all the world; and remember—though you can't like me now—how I adore you.”

“Stop—don't talk so to me,” she replied. “You are rich. I am, what I am; and language that might be only audacious if we were equals, is insult now.”

“Good Heavens! won't you understand me? I only meant, I can't help saying it, that I care to win no one else on earth, and never shall. If you but knew—”

“What need I know more than I do? I believe, rather from your looks than from your words, that you talk your folly in good faith. But I have heard too much of that, for one day. One thing more I have to say, you must leave this immediately; and, if from Miss Max, or any other person, you try to make out anything more, ever so little, about me, about my story, name, business, than I have told you, you never speak to me one word more. That's understood. Here now is my cousin.”

Miss Max, smiling pleasantly, said:

“Dear me, Mr. Marston, who could have fancied that you would have been here! I could not think who it could be, as I came up the hill. Were you at Wybourne Church?”

“Oh, no! I wai——” He was going to say, “waited outside,” but he corrected himself. “I arrived too late. A pretty little church it seems to be.”

“Oh! quite a beautiful little church, inside. Some one showed you the path here, I suppose; those up there are the ruins of old Wybourne Hall: what an awful fog we had last night! Do you know, it was really quite frightful going through it at the fearful speed we did. You must come and drink tea with us, Mr. Marston.”

“No, dear, we must not have any one to tea to-night; I have particular reasons,

and besides, Mr. Marston has to leave this immediately," said Miss Maud, inhospitably.

He looked at her ruefully.

"You told me you were going immediately?" said the young lady, gently, but with a slight emphasis.

"But I dare say you can manage to put it off for an hour or so, Mr. Marston—can't you?" asked Miss Max.

He glanced at the inexorable Miss Maud, and he read his doom in that pretty face.

"I'm afraid—it is so very kind of you—but I'm really afraid it is quite impossible," he answers.

"I don't like to bore you, Mr. Marston; but if you *can* stay to tea, just an hour or two—can't you manage that? I shall be so glad," urged the old lady.

"Mr. Marston, I believe, made a promise to be at another place this evening," said the girl; "and Mr. Marston says he prides himself on keeping his word."

Though she was looking down at the grass, and said this with something like a smile, and in a careless way, Mr. Marston dares not disobey the reminder it conveys.

"That is perfectly true, what Miss Maud says. I made that promise to a person whom I dare not disappoint, whom I respect more than I can describe," and he added in a low tone to Maud, "whom it is my pride to obey."

"Good-bye, Mr. Marston," she says, with a smile, extending her pretty hand very frankly.

How he felt as he touched it!

"Good-bye, Miss Max," he says, turning with a sigh and a smile to that lady.

"Good-bye, since so it must be, and I hope we may chance to meet again, Mr. Marston," said the old lady, kindly giving him her thin old hand.

"So do I—so do I—thank you, very much," says he, and he pauses, looking as if he was not sure that he had not something more to say.

"Good-bye, Miss Max," he repeats, "and good-bye," he says again to the girl, extending his hand.

Once more, for a second or two, he holds her hand in his, and then he finds himself walking quickly under the straggling hawthorns. The sprays are rattling on his hat as he crosses the stile. He is striding through the first narrow field over which his walk from the church had been. Lifeless and dimmed the hedges are, and the songs of the birds all round are but a noise which he scarcely hears. There is but one thought

in his brain and heart, as he strides through this cloistered solitude, as swiftly as if his rate of travel could shorten the time between this and the ball at Wymering.

This Mr. Marston was not so much a fool as not to know that, being a man of honour, he had taken a very serious step. The young lady—for be her troubles and distresses what they might, a lady she surely was—whom he had pursued so far, and to whom he had spoken in language quite irrevocable, had now, in her small hand, his fate and fortunes.

There seemed to walk beside him, along his grassy path, an angry father, and the sneers and gabble of kindred, who had a right to talk, were barking and laughing at his heels. He knew very well what he had to count upon, and had known it all along. But it did not daunt him, either then or now.

Here was his first love, and an idol not created by his fancy, but, undoubtedly, the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. A first love devouring material so combustible; a generous fellow, impetuous, sanguine, dominated by imagination, and who had delivered eloquent lectures upon the folly of political economy, and the intrinsic tyranny of our social system.

These things troubled him, no doubt; but thus beset, he had no more notion of turning about than had honest Christian and Hopeful as they plodded through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. He felt, I dare say, pretty much as a knight when riding into the lists to mortal combat for the mistress of his heart.

He held himself now, so far as his own personal case went, irrevocably betrothed to his beautiful but cruel mistress; and so far from halting between two opinions, if what had passed this evening had been still unsaid, he would have gone round the world for a chance of speaking it.

Literally abiding by his promise, he left Wybourne as suddenly as he came.

Miss Max looked after him as the underwood hid him from view, with the somewhat blank and ruminating countenance which belongs to the lady about whose ears a favourite castle in the air has just tumbled.

"Well," said she, turning to her young companion, nodding, and looking wise, "that gentleman is gone on a fool's errand, I venture to say. Have you any idea where he's gone?"

"Not the least."

"I liked him very much. I hope he's

not going to make a fool of himself. I really thought he liked you. He is so full of romance. See how you blush!"

"I always do when I think I shall, and when I particularly wish not," she said, with a smile, but a little vexed.

"Well, I suspect, from what he said, that he is going to ask some young lady an interesting question; or, perhaps, he is actually engaged; goodness knows."

Miss Max was walking under the lordly trees towards home and tea, with her young cousin beside her.

"That's a blackbird," she says, listening for a moment. "What a delicious evening!"

"Has your mother set out again upon her usual mysterious journey?" inquired Miss Max.

"I fancy not—not yet, at least," answered the girl, listlessly.

"Well, I may say to you, I can't understand your mother the least, my dear."

The girl made no answer: she was looking up, with a listless and sad face, toward the fleecy clouds that now glowed in the tint of sunset, and the rooks, that make no holiday of Sunday, winging homeward, high in air, with a softened cawing.

CACKLERS.

INSTINCT, I suppose, we must call the moving force which makes a barn-door fowl cackle when she has laid an egg. It would be altogether better—better at any rate for the increase of the race of fowls—if the hen would wait until she had laid her allotted number of eggs, had sat upon them, and had hatched them into chickens, when, with living witnesses of her success in the perpetuation of her kind scratching by her side, she might strut about the farm-yard, flap her wings, plume herself, and cackle to her heart's content, with impunity. As it is, she announces to her limited world, too soon for her success in chicken raising, that she has laid an egg, by cackling. By thus prematurely and noisily glorifying herself upon having obtained the first step towards the honours of fowl maternity, the hen but invites the thrifty housewife to sally forth and search for the egg, over the production of which she is so proudly noisy and vain-glorious. And so the nest is robbed, and the incipient chick is straightway boiled or fried, beaten into a custard, or made into a savoury omelette,

incorporated into the dressing of a salad, or used to give consistency to the matutinal rum-and-milk of the master of the house. Learning nothing by experience, yet not forgetting that it is her mission to lay eggs, the foolish hen lays another and another, cackles and is robbed as before. If by chance chickens are produced from any of her eggs, it is by their being warmed into life under the feathery breast of some vicarious mother, whose capacity for the duty imposed upon her is known and relied upon.

From this unfortunate instinct of cackling—unfortunate at least from a hen's point of view—from this counting of chickens before they are hatched, it comes that from so many eggs so few chickens are produced. But it is not hens alone which cackle when they have done, or begin to do, or resolve to do, or think of doing, something wonderful. Men and women individually, and communities and nations collectively, strut and cackle at the first thought of, or at the first step taken towards the doing of, something never destined to be done, and which is to fail mainly because of cackling. Human beings who cackle, inasmuch as they are supposed not to be governed by instinct, but by what we are accustomed to consider to be the higher attribute of reason, are, so far, greater fools than hens. Besides, the hen waits at any rate until she has taken the first step—until she has laid an egg. Mankind cackle when they have conceived an idea. Hence it is that so many ideas and schemes come to nought, or are carried to successful issue by some one not the originator of them.

Inventors and discoverers have often been cacklers, and thus the honours and profits of their inventions and discoveries have been lost to themselves, their very claim to even coincident invention and discovery being denied or doubted. They cackled, and their nests were robbed, and their eggs were hatched by others less scrupulous, but more industrious and persevering, than themselves. Trace the history of any great invention, and see how many claimants there are to it, the majority of whom, if the truth were known, would be found to have lost their claims by cackling. The successful application of most inventions and discoveries will be found to have been brought about, not by their inventors and discoverers who have cackled, but by practical and reticent men who have given to their crude ideas form and sub-

stance, and have not cackled till success was assured. Inventors and discoverers who have not cackled, and who have been capable of bringing to successful and practical use their inventions and discoveries, have generally secured to themselves the fruits of their ingenuity. It is not only that cackling makes the right of property in an idea, as in an egg, more precarious, but when failure ensues in the carrying of it out—even when no attempt is made at appropriation—ridicule is unsparingly heaped upon the cackler. In less enlightened times, inventors and discoverers who cackled have been imprisoned and burnt at the stake; now-a-days, cacklers whose ideas are impracticable, or who, if they are the contrary, have not the ability and force of character to carry them out before they are stolen, are derided as dreamers and madmen, and sometimes from disappointed brooding over that which they have not the power to advance beyond an idea, they actually become mad, and justify the estimate which was formed of them.

Authors and artists are often cacklers; but they do not suffer so often nor so much from their cackling as do inventors and discoverers; probably because there is less temptation to steal ideas or to carry out intentions from the elaboration of which so little fame or profit is to be made; or, perhaps, because the public manner in which the cacklers do their cackling deters others from forestalling them. Cackling writers, painters, or sculptors, who trumpet forth after a club-dinner that they are going to write an article on this subject or upon that, dramatise this novel, or burlesque that epic, paint this event, or chisel that figure or group, do more injury to their less demonstrative listeners than they do to themselves. Many a man capable of writing upon some particular subject, and with industry enough to do it quickly, and talent enough to do it well, has abandoned the intention, sometimes even after he had begun the work, because some cackler had announced that he was going to write upon the same subject. Many a reticent man finds himself thus publicly anticipated in the work, literary or artistic, which he has chalked out for himself, and for which he is eminently qualified. He is not the only loser: the loss suffered by the public is greater than his. These cacklers often, by their uncalled-for confidences, are tacitly permitted to acquire a sort of pre-emptive right to subjects which they either want the power or the in-

dustry to improve. In the United States, when a man pre-empta a quarter-section of government land, he must begin its improvement and cultivation, and must occupy it within a certain specified time, or vacate it in favour of some one else more able, if not more willing, than himself to perform the obligations which are the conditions of pre-emption. So I have often thought it would be well to establish a rule in literary and artistic clubs and coteries, that when a man publicly cackles over an idea, unless he works it out to the best of his ability within a reasonable time—not being prevented by illness or other unavoidable cause—he should be considered as having no right to complain if some one else should make the subject his own.

The mercantile classes are not given to cackling as a rule. They generally contrive to conceal and hatch, or try to hatch, all the eggs they lay, though they do not always get healthy chickens from them. They brag a good deal when they have done something great, and made much money; but they almost invariably keep their own counsel as to what they are going to do, and, if possible, as to what they are doing. The merchant is not heard announcing publicly at his club to other merchants who, like himself, are on the look-out for a good thing, that he is going, or has just gone, into speculation in indigo, or cotton, or saltpetre, or silk.

The shipowner does not proclaim aloud on 'Change what he thinks the best port to seek a cargo for, at least not until he has succeeded in getting charters for all his own vessels, and then he only gives his advice—for a consideration. The successful speculator in the funds, or in railway or mining shares, is notorious for his reticence. Even as a broker operating for a commission he generally declines to advise, but leaves his clients to decide for themselves the ventures they are to engage in, and, after they have decided, he is ready to execute their orders, to buy or to sell, provided he has a sufficient margin in hand, or has good reason to believe that they will be prepared with the necessary contango on settling day if they wish to hold over. Cackling amongst business men is rare, because it is ruinous. Cacklers who have embarked their means in mercantile pursuits, from cotton-brokers to costermongers, when they begin to cackle, immediately cease to prosper, and soon cease to trade.

Ministers of state and legislators are

great cacklers. The former cackle to the party which places them in power, the latter to the constituencies which elect them. The eggs which they lay and cackle over are not often stolen, because they are seldom worth stealing, and they are as rarely hatched, because they are either addled or not very assiduously sat upon; indeed, they are generally what are called in some parts of the country wind eggs. Diplomats are supposed never to cackle, but the excessive care they take to mystify the world as to what they are about, in itself leads to discovery. When they do hatch their eggs, it is remarkable that there is never any certainty whether they may not produce innocent ducklings, as often as harmless chickens: venomous snakes, and stinging scorpions, as often as either.

Great potentates, presidents, kings, and emperors, have some of them been great cacklers.

Charles the First of England and Louis the Sixteenth of France lost their thrones and their heads, the one cackling over an egg laid by himself, from which he fondly hoped was to spring despotic power to him and his race, the other, brooding over an egg, the product of a long course of despotism, which had been handed down to him to hatch, and which, unfortunately, was not destroyed with him, but remained in the nest to be quickened by his republican successors, Robespierre, Marat, and the rest. From this egg sprang anarchy, confusion, death, and the many evils which from time to time for the last three-quarters of a century have devastated the fair land of France, and made her now and then a nuisance to her neighbours.

Napoleon the Third, one of the numerous progeny of that same egg, offered one of the latest examples of cackling too soon when he announced so melo-dramatically that his son "had received his baptism of fire at Saarbruck;" and the very latest cackler is the new-born French Republic, which, not old enough to lay an egg, is endangering the safety of the nest which it is preparing by announcing to the world that rather than harm shall come to it, it and all France will die in the ruins of Paris.

Philosophers of the peace school cackled too soon, as is proved by the present unhappy war; but they have not lost their egg, which was laid more than eighteen hundred years ago, nor has it become addled. The successful hatching is only

delayed for a time. The offspring, "Peace on earth, goodwill to men," will be very welcome to the nations which are now exhausting themselves by strife, and by those who, like ourselves, have been in danger of being driven into the quarrel.

But fool as a hen proves herself to be when she cackles, because she has laid an egg, she is not half such a fool as when she sits upon eggs and hatches ducks, and does not know that they are not chickens until they take to the water, and to eating garbage, and is not sure of it even then. Her folly begins when she doesn't know the difference between her own shapely white eggs and the pale green squat ones of the duck; it increases to temporary insanity when she clucks about with pride and scratches for the sustenance of a lot of flat-footed spoon-billed creatures, with as much resemblance to chickens as the slender silvery salmon bears to the slimy broad-headed codfish, and it descends into absolute idiocy, when she flies on to an island stone to guard her spurious chicks from the dangers of the mill-pond. Mankind furnish examples of such folly and madness when they brood over and hatch schemes which, blinded by the pride of supposed maternity, they do not recognise as not their own until the evil which is in them begins unmistakably to show itself, and makes manifest their real nature.

If it were not for the warning cackle of hens the land would be overrun with fowls. If it were not for the warning cackle of men a brood of monsters might be hatched which would overrun and disturb the world.

'NEATH THE SCAUR.

THE roseate light dies into purple-black,
Within the shadows of Plynllymmon's crest,
And mid the murky gloom of waning day
The bandit raven croaks from bare brown crag
His ghostly dirge.

The silver horns arise
Of night's white disc, rise up above the chain
Of yonder grey-lined hills. More glorious,
In weird fantastic beauty, show the wilds
'Neath winter's icy touch, than when the kiss
Of golden summer warms the landscape round,
And all is draped in green.

'Neath yon sharp ridge
Nestles the pirate kite; blue martens roost
Upon the shelves beyond, and on the scaur
The golden eagle spreads her dusky wings
Over her half-grown couplet: sighs the wind,
Driving the fleecy clouds across the face
Of the perturbed moon, and sobbing, wails,
Sending sweet echoes of an unknown song
Across the broad ravine. Dim, dreamy glimpse
Of spirit-land, of souls that freed from clay,
Seem far, yet near, and from the jasper gates

*Of the great city, answer to our own,
With that grand mystery, which none shall read
Till things of earth dissolve, and time and space
Merge in the waters of eternity.*

FROM BRADFORD TO BRINDISI.

IN TWO FLIGHTS. FLIGHT THE FIRST.

THE house of business with which I am connected is probably one of the largest "concerns" in the kingdom. None of your new-fangled mushroom excrescences, run up within the last few years, but a solid, old-fashioned, steady-going house, which has been established for centuries. It originally started in the carrying line, in which it still does an extensive trade, but of late years some of the junior partners, who have worked their way up into the firm, have tacked on little specialities of their own, so that in addition to our original carrying, we now do a banking business, a life insurance business, and have recently gone very extensively into fir-poles, metallic wire, and philosophical instruments. My connexion with the house extends over twenty years, but my occupation has been principally of a sedentary nature, and it is only lately that I have been called upon to travel. As representative of our house, I have visited most of the large and a great many of the small towns in the country during the past twelve months, but latterly the scene of my operations has been laid in Yorkshire and the North. In York itself the melancholy long street of Bootham has often echoed to my footfall; I have drunk in the keen and exhilarating air of the big moors between Pickering and Whitby: and I have wandered in Teesdale, which Walter Scott has immortalised in his poems, and which a more recent genius, kind, simple-hearted Thomas Creswick, loved to paint. I am known in grim Halifax and smoky Rochdale; in the romantic purlieus of Briggate and Boarlane in Leeds I am no stranger; and the lovely Hebes in the quaint luncheon-cellar under St. George's Hall at Bradford are pleased to welcome my arrival. I was staying in Bradford in the early days of last October. My ears were growing accustomed to the "sabot clank," as Father Prout calls it, or, more prosaically, to the pattering of the wooden clogs on the pavement, and to that frightful creaking which all the ungreased wheels at Bradford are perpetually pouring forth. My eyes were growing accustomed to the smoke, and my nose to the smells, when one day, on my return to luncheon at the Victoria Hotel

from a business excursion, the hall-porter told me that a telegram was awaiting me.

Owing to a recent transaction with which my house has had something to do, the receipt of a telegram has been robbed of a great deal of its ancient importance. Formerly one hesitated to open the light-coloured envelope enclosing the message, knowing that its contents must necessarily be of great weight, or such an expensive mode of communication would not have been resorted to. Now it may mean "chops and tomato sauce," or "bring your flageolet;" so that I was by no means prepared for anything so startling as these words, "Could you start for Brindisi on Thursday morning? Wire reply." The message was from the house. I accordingly wired reply, and the result of a further interchange of wiring was, that I found myself early on Thursday morning at the Cannon-street Station, with a little sheaf of coupons in my pocket, which would carry me to Munich, the utmost limit to which I could book. Travelling through France being, to a certain extent, considered dangerous, and directly contrary to the instructions of the house, my way lay through Ostend, bound for which port a newly-built boat, a great improvement on the old cockleshells, but still far beneath the Holyhead and Kingstown steamers in size and accommodation, lay with her steam up, ready to receive us. Close by her was the Calais packet, to which only two passengers intrusted themselves. We had some five-and-twenty passengers on board, all foreigners, I imagined, with the exception of one Englishman and myself. The wind was blowing pretty fresh, there was a tolerable amount of sea on, and the foreigners, as is their wont, made themselves up into extraordinary looking bundles, and lay at full length on the deck, never moving until we arrived at Ostend. The old custom of refusing to allow you to land with anything in your hand is done away with, and carrying our carpet-bags and wrappers, we hurried to the railway, intending to get some dinner before the departure of the train. It was then nearly three o'clock, I had had nothing since a very slight breakfast at seven A.M., and my appetite had become sharpened, not merely by the sea air, but by the recollection of that very excellent buffet at the Calais station, where everything is ready prepared, so clean and appetisingly odiferous, for the traveller arriving by the boat. At Ostend station, however, there is no buffet, and no time allowed for one to

go to any restaurant in the town, which is at some little distance, so that with the exception of some particularly stodgy loaves, filled with currants, which the old lady who sold them called "gateaux," but which the Flemish porter characterised as "boonz," I was compelled to depend for sustenance on the contents of my flask, and a hasty morsel snatched at Verviers, until we reached Cologne at eleven o'clock at night.

The Hôtel Disch is the house I generally "use" at Cologne (I am afraid this travelling is rendering my phraseology dreadfully commercial!); but the rain was coming down in such torrents, and I had heard such an excellent account of the Hôtel du Nord, which is in the immediate neighbourhood of the station, that I determined to try it. I accordingly got into the omnibus belonging to that establishment, and found that I had for a fellow-passenger, an old man of Hebraic aspect, dressed in dirt and braid, with a pinchbeck ring on the forefinger of his filthy hand, whom I had noticed from time to time on the journey. I addressed to him some remarks in German about the violence of the down-pour, but he looked at me in a helpless way, and said, "Ah, non parly, non parly!" then to himself, "I should like to tell him I should be dashed glad to get something to eat in this dashed place."

The Hôtel du Nord deserves the praises which have been bestowed upon it. It is a splendid house, admirably kept, and though it was midnight before we reached there, the cuisine was in full swing, and the whole establishment on the alert. After a hasty wash I sat down to supper with two or three of my German travellers (not being desirous either of being mistaken for a madman, or converted into a courier, I make a point, when abroad, of never associating with my fellow-countrymen), and we were getting on merrily enough, when a cold shadow was thrown across us by the advent of the Great Briton. There was no possibility of mistaking him—his cleanliness, his long wristbands, his gold locket, his neatly parted hair, and his intolerable insolence, all betokened him a native of our fair isle. Then he seated himself at a table and called "waiter" in a loud voice, and on the waiter presenting himself, uttered another dissyllabic word, "supper." The courteous waiter bending down began murmuring into the stranger's ear a list of various succulent little dishes, but the Great Briton sneered at them all, and burst forth again with a bray of "cold

meat." When I left the room he and his companion were indulging in a meal of cold veal and bottled ale, which, from its indigestibility and nastiness, must have forcibly reminded them of their native land.

Now to bed, to find traces of advanced civilisation since my last visit, in improved cleanliness and carpeted floor, but to recognise old friends in the pie-dish and milk-jug apparatus for washing, in the bed with the enormous sloping pillows, which keep you all night in a semi-upright position, and with the "decke," which invariably falls off, and leaves you frozen till morning. Up at six, and off by the quick train which runs in and out along the little railway skirting the Rhine from Cologne to Mayence. Ah, me!

When first I saw ye, Cari luoghi,
I'd scarce a beard upon my face!

There was no railway in those days, and the last time but one that I visited the Rhine was in the company of one whom the public—which at one time so delighted in him—has forgotten, but who was my dear friend, and whose memory a certain small knot of us yet keep green—Albert Smith. He was visiting the "exulting and abounding river" then, with an eye to business, and I who knew it so well was acting as his cicerone. And now every crag, every ruined castle, brings back to me some remembrance of him, and the refrain of the song, which we wrote together, and which he sung with such point,

Sitting on the deck together, in the autumn weather
fine,
Drinking what the waiter calls, eine halbe flasche
Moselwein,

is ringing in my ears. No awning-covered steam-boats now on the Rhine, no pleasant tourist passenger traffic, no rafts that I see (I lived three days on a raft once, and baring being nearly swamped in the whirlpool of the Lörelei, had a very good time of it), nothing but a few black tugs dragging heavily laden barges against the stream, or here and there peasants crossing from one bank to another, and shovelling the water away with their flat wooden spades, as is their custom.

Was it at Bonn or at Coblenz that I first saw a French prisoner? It must have been at the latter place, after we had crossed the broad bridge over the Moselle, and had caught a glimpse of Ehrenbreitstein on the opposite bank of the river. He was a little man, whose melancholy appearance scarcely consorted well with his rather

comic style of apparel, for he had on the red military trousers of his nation, a long Prussian soldier's over-coat, and a white English billycock hat. He was an object of much remark, and to all the staring and pointing and grimaces he said nothing, but he looked round on his captors, and then shrugged his shoulders, and expectorated in a manner which meant much. More French prisoners hired out to farmers, and hard at work in the fields. More Prussian soldiers right about facing, and going through the various rudiments of drill, a glimpse of Mayence, the strongly fortified, a dash through Darmstadt, the neat and pretty residence of our Princess Alice, a reminiscence of the whole line of country from Cologne to Asschaffenburg, ruddy with the glorious autumnal tint on vineyard and forest, and scarp and fell.

I am to have two hours' rest at Würzburg, and there I propose taking my meal, as I have had nothing to eat since early morning in Cologne. Entering into conversation with the waiter, who attends upon me in the admirable restaurant at the station, I am assured by him that the half-past seven train by which I propose travelling is merely a luggage train, with a few passenger carriages attached, and the arrival of which at its destination is entirely dependent on the guard, who has it shunted, or switched, or sided, according to the number of trains containing troops or wounded men which he may meet on the way. I had much better, my friendly waiter advises me, remain there until two the next morning, when there is an express train which goes straight to Munich, and is in correspondence with the day mail for Italy. It is now five in the afternoon, and to remain at a railway for nine hours is, as we should say commercially, "a large order." Nevertheless, I find that the waiter is right, so that what I have to do is to endeavour to amuse myself as best I can. Let me first look through the various departments of the station itself. It is apparently a great centre of organisation, and its superiority to anything of its class in England is at once manifest. Here are the offices for the issue of tickets, for the weighing and forwarding of the luggage, the post-office, the telegraph office—all separate large rooms, all admirably fitted and appointed; the restaurant, two large rooms, one for first and second, the other for third-class passengers, and the Etappen-Commando. What is the Etappen-Commando? to what language do the words belong? I think I

have seen it mentioned in the letters of the war correspondents to the London newspapers: but I confess I am utterly ignorant of their meaning. I look through the glazed doors on which the mystic words are inscribed, and I see a very comfortable room, fitted with arm-chairs, and writing-tables covered with very official-looking documents, the walls hung round with maps and plans. At the largest table is seated a white-haired, white-bearded, stiff-built, stalwart officer, and two or three younger men, apparently writing from his dictation, or carrying out his instructions. I have no further time to devote to the Etappen-Commando, for at a kind of temporary booth established on the platform, and labelled "Hülfs Verein," I notice some excitement going forward, and strolling thither I find a number of men and women, all wearing the red cross badge of the Geneva convention on their arms, occupied in sorting big loaves of bread, and in tapping small barrels of beer, while one of them is cutting up a ham into anything but Vauxhall slices. I find, too, a little gathering of the townspeople on the platform, and, on inquiring, I learn that a train of Prussian soldiers going to the front is immediately expected. In a few minutes it arrives, the engine and some of the carriages decked with laurels, and the soldiers who compose its load shouting lustily, and singing the "free German Rhine." No sooner is it alongside than the Geneva auxiliaries rush to it, carrying enormous baskets of bread and krügs of beer. This last gift seems to be superfluous, as the "liquoring up" has evidently been going on at previous stations, and the majority of the men have already had more than is good for them. But they are fêted, and caressed, and applauded, and go on their way rejoicing. They are scarcely clear of the station before we receive information that another train may be expected immediately. When it arrives we find it a train of a very different character, filled with wounded men. If the demonstrations of the Hülfs Verein were genial to the train which has just left, they are enthusiastic to the new arrival; the doors of the great luggage waggons, thrown open, and disclosing numbers of men in a helpless condition, are at once besieged by the provender bringers, and those who are well enough to descend are helped out, and led to the restaurant with the greatest kindness, and there entertained with much generosity. The kindly feeling is contagious. I catch it as soon as

any one, and rush about distributing the contents of my cigar-case, which I had brought from home, then buying a whole lot of German-grown cigars, which are very cheap, and I dare say very nasty, but which are undoubtedly very large, and very much liked. Some of the wounded men, as provident as Nelson's coxswain, take the cigars, but hint a desire for schnaps, and straightway the kreutzers fly. Then a rapid inspection of some of the wounded, who reside in or are billeted on the neighbourhood, is made by the grey-headed officer from the Etappen Commando, they are drafted off, the train proceeds with the rest, and we are left again in silence.

I had only ordered, not eaten, my dinner, and there is no more agreeable means of passing the time than by inwardly refreshing oneself, so I returned to the restaurant, and sat down to an excellent meal, and amused myself with looking around me. And, in the first place, I am grateful that this weary length of time is to be got through rather at a foreign than at an English railway station. I recal the English waiting-rooms, of which I have seen so much lately, the soul-depressing drab colour of the walls; the hard seats so primly arranged; the flying leaves of texts suspended like religious towels over towel-horses; the cheering advertisement of the Railway Insurance Company; and the never-failing reference to the exact spot in the neighbourhood where Horniman's tea is to be procured. Now I am seated in a splendid salle, brightly painted, well lit, warm, and cheerful, little marble-topped tables scattered around; all the chairs are easy and comfortable; the walls are painted in fresco, after classical designs, and one end of the room is filled up by a large sideboard, half walnut-wood, half looking-glass, on which plate, and glass, and china, and bottles of bright liquids, and long flasks with tinfoil necks, and bon-bon boxes, and all sorts of piquant edibles, the coquetry of charcuterie, are tastefully arranged, and in the little cosey place behind three or four clean, comfortable, and sufficiently well, but certainly not over-dressed women, are seated. Enter a short, stout man, who asks for a glass of beer, drinks it standing, and departs. Enter a thin, gentlemanly, bearded man, wrapped in a large cloak with a fur collar, leading an Italian greyhound by a string; he seats himself at a table, and calls for a cup of coffee, and, while drinking it, chats pleas-

santly with the waiter. Enter a high official of the railway in uniform, who goes straight to the bar, into the sacred precincts of which he is admitted. This gentleman is old, and not particularly well favoured, but he has evidently what is vulgarly called the gift of the gab, and bears out the truth of the French philosopher's saying, "Avec les hommes l'amour entre par les yeux, avec les femmes par les oreilles," for the ladies crowd around him, and clap their hands and scream with delight at his little witticisms, and vie with each other in trying to do him honour. One of these young women bends forward to look at the clock (the hands of which seem to have a very odd movement, moving palpably forward with great jumps like the hands of a clock in a theatrical scene), takes down her cloak and hood, unhooks a play bill, and is off to the theatre; the railway official making a jocular offer to accompany her, which is negatived by the other ladies amongst whom he is detained. Then I go out for a "constitutional," and for an hour and a half pace up and down the broad platform, not quite understanding why I am there at all, and quite incapable of making out what day of the week it is, or how long I have been away from home.

When I return to the restaurant I find the whole staff of the Etappen-Commando, grey-headed chief, and several subalterns, and a sprinkling of civilians, established round a table. Each man has a huge glass of beer before him; each man has a pipe or cigar in his mouth; and each man is talking at the top of his voice, and pantomiming with every one of his ten fingers. Their talk is of the war of course, and I notice that, whereas they speak of France and Frenchmen with contempt, they speak of England and Englishmen with disgust. Sitting by, smoking my cigar, and sipping my hock and seltzer water, I hear the German opinion of my country's doings expressed in all candour. Unquestionably the speakers were ignorant of my nationality, or out of courtesy they would have been more reticent; but their talk did them a great deal of good, and me no harm, and, moreover, a great deal of what they said had the strange merit of being strictly true. So they talked—ye gods, how they talked!—until midnight, when, with an amount of bowing and bending which would have done the Lord Chamberlain's heart good to witness, they wished each other good-night, and departed.

Then came on a very sad time indeed. I could not eat any more; I had drunk and smoked more than enough; all the ladies in the bar retired save one, who composed herself to sleep in the darkest corner; the solitary waiter left "tucked his head under his wing," like the robin in the nursery song, and went to sleep too. I had no book, so I could not read; I could not sit staring straight before me, so I started to my feet, and for two hours walked up and down that long room, weaving foot patterns of great intricacy among the tables. The train, which was to have started at two, did not leave till three; but I got possession of my carriage, had myself locked in, and wrapping myself in my huge Ulster over-coat, I pulled my sealskin cap over my eyes, and went to sleep. I only woke once at some station where our train stopped to receive two coffins containing the bodies of officers of high rank, who had fallen in the war, and then I slept again until we reached Munich.

BRIGANDS.

THE world, not long since, was affrighted and horrified by the deeds of brigands in Italy, of brigands in Greece, and of brigands in Spain. Those deeds are not forgotten yet; but they were punished to a certain extent, and it was hoped we had heard the last of them. But no; that happy conclusion was not to be. The plague was not stayed; and now it has broken out again in the country where we may almost fear it is permanently endemic. In the second week of October last, a band of brigands, said to number about twenty, crossed the frontier from Turkey, marched into Greece unobserved, and, though including men well known to the authorities as possessing intimate acquaintance with the country round Livadeia, were allowed to take up their quarters in the neighbourhood of that flourishing provincial town without discovery.

On Tuesday, the 11th, they entered this town of six thousand inhabitants, while it was still light, and carried off Mr. Philo, the deputy of, or member for Livadeia, proprietor of a large landed estate in the vicinity, and Mr. Leonardides, in whose house he was staying. The capture was effected in accordance with their usual tactics. During the short Grecian twilight, six brigands walked into the town in parties of two, looking as like peasants as they

could. They had ascertained that the men of the house were to be absent all night on farm business, and that only the deputy and his host remained; so they crept in at the door unnoticed, pinioned and gagged their captives, and intimidated and silenced the women before any alarm could be given. Other brigands were, at the same time, watching in the street, to prevent anybody's leaving or entering the house. After it was dark the captives were carried off, the brigands taking them separately through the streets, and thus gained the open country. They declared to the women, before leaving the house, that if any information was given, and a pursuit attempted, they would murder their prisoners. Their deed was, therefore, concealed for some hours, and they had the whole night to gain their place of concealment.

In this astounding case of outrage, it is specially to be noted—as a clue to the motive of other like outrages—that great sympathy was felt for Mr. Philo, who is personally well known and highly esteemed by the best men in Athens, where he generally resides. He is a man of education, has been elected president of the Chamber of Deputies in King Otho's time, and occupies a high political position without being either an official or a place-hunter. He is one of the independent provincial landed proprietors of whom Greece may be proud, as being gentlemen in education and in conduct. One of his daughters resides in Bavaria, as maid of honour, with the de-throned queen, Amalia.

Mr. Philo's case is by no means uncommon (he and his companion were ransomed for something more than three thousand pounds sterling). It may be instructive to cast a glance at the peculiar features of this class of crimes. They are especially hideous, revolting, and diabolical. Why? What is it that makes brigandage a stigma and an opprobrium to the country that fails to repress it? Brigandage is robbery, personal violence, often murder. In other countries besides Italy and Greece, unhappily, robbery, personal violence, and murder are committed without exciting the same execration as the deeds perpetrated by the brigands of Greece. Garrotting and plundering the old and infirm; stoppages by night on lonely roads, with threats of "Your money or your life!" burglaries, ending in the shedding of blood, for the sake of a booty in cash or valuables, are all bad; bad enough, and to

spare: but universal feeling regards them as venial offences when compared with the system of kidnapping so ruthlessly practised by the robbers of Greece. Why should it be so?

Brigandage is robbery, personal violence, extortion, kidnapping, torture, and murder combined; but, if we inspect it closely, it is something more; and it is that something more which excites our execration. An ordinary robber, garrotter, or murderer attacks his victim, and his victim only. He despoils him of what he has, and there is an end of it. He makes no one but the patient suffer, at the time, or previous to the consummation of the act of violence. The brigand makes his victim merely an instrument to work on the feelings of others—the screw to be put on the affections of his friends. A merely rich man, in the hands of brigands, supported by no love or respect from without, would be comparatively of little worth. It is not the prisoner who is squeezable, but his belongings. A housebreaker, resisted and forced to fight, will kill his opponent in the heat of the strife. The brigand in cold blood tortures his prisoner, and kills him, if need be, to extort from others the money demanded. The prisoner may care less about his own sufferings, and his own life, than his friends care for him. The brigand knows it, calculates upon it, and takes advantage of it. He is aware that affection is sometimes stronger than self.

It is this infliction of vicarious torture, this cowardly crushing of one heart by cruelties exercised on or threatened to another, which brands brigandage with its superlative infamy. By seizing the person of one beloved object, the brigand thrusts his hand simultaneously into many pockets, and so commits a concentrated theft. He robs in safety people at a distance. He does not give fair fight, nor anything like it. There is no possibility of an honest stand-up struggle; no pretence to the conduct of loyal belligerents. We should call it a thoroughly un-English mode of attack. Our highwaymen of old would have scorned to be guilty of such proceedings. And yet we may note now and then, in England, some faint shadow of that peculiar line of business.

In a room in a by-street near a fashionable square, sits a close-shaven man with grisly hair, expressionless eyes, and bushy whiskers. Books about the peerage and the landed gentry are his Bible and his Testament. He has made it his careful study

to know the habits of the young men about town with expectations, taking peculiar interest in those who promise to outrun the constable; judiciously and opportunely he issues letters, containing the most philanthropic offers. Temporary embarrassments are to be cleared away, ready money is to be supplied for a mere formality, a nothing—a few scrawls on a bit of paper. Assistance is supplied from time to time on the same easy terms, until the benevolent gentleman thinks it right to stop. When the young debtor is fairly caught, the strings of the net are drawn tightly round him. If he do not pay what is asked, he is ruined for life; and of course it was known that he could not pay. But what does that matter? By means unknown his paterfamilias is made acquainted with the state of things; also a wealthy maiden aunt, supposed to have been fond of the curly-headed boy. A family council is held, assisted perhaps by the family legal adviser. It turns out that measures have been cleverly taken: resistance would only cause unavailing scandal; purses are clubbed, funds are somehow raised, and the captive is ransomed from the brigand's—I beg the smooth-shaved gentleman's pardon—from the money-lender's clutches.

There is a cottage of gentility with a neglected garden, all the more striking for its negligence. Its roses luxuriate unchecked by the knife, its summer fruits hang ungathered on the bough. Within sits a fair young lady, pale and thin, and prematurely growing old. She is nursing a little boy, her consolation and her stay. But where is the father? Ah, where indeed? She married, for love, one unworthy of her. He absents himself often, scarcely condescending to put forth a pretext, and on returning just keeps up appearances. Relations, guessing the truth, whisper to each other, "I'm sure they are not a happy couple." The neighbours, more sharp-eyed, know all about it. He now and then ill-treats her. When? At his first truant outbreak, her parents said nothing; at his second, they remonstrated. Ill-treatment the first. After his third, he wanted more money. Refused; ill-treatment. After the fourth, money granted; no ill-treatment. And so forth; month after month, and year after year. He has her, and he means to keep her. Having her, he can defy the reproaches and bleed the pockets of those who love her dearly. It has gone on hitherto, to avoid blazoning such sorrows to the world; but it can

hardly go on indefinitely. The protection of the law will have to be appealed to; and the sooner the better, say we. But the case itself—is it one of incompatibility, domestic unhappiness, cruelty, and the rest; or is it an application of brigandage to civilised life? They might think it a clever stroke in Greece, not unworthy to have been invented there.

Brigandage is the pursuit of wicked ends by the agency of fear respecting the fate of others. The Reign of Terror, in the first French Revolution, was political brigandage pushed to its utmost limits. It was a standing threat to this effect: "You see the guillotine set up in permanence; you see how we send to it, in any numbers we please, venerable old men, delicately nurtured women, and almost girls. Shape your political conduct strictly in accordance with our views, or we will sacrifice those dearest to you, for the maintenance and confirmation of our power." Was not this true brigandage, with ambition for the passion to be gratified instead of greed?

Social brigandage assumes hydra-headed shapes, some of them too terrible to be pictured here. The victims ordinarily selected are those who have the most, and the most respectable belongings, or who happen to be the most defenceless—clergymen, medical men, schoolmasters, single ladies, widows, young men just entering life. Not seldom the pressure becomes so strong and so maddening, that the wretched sufferer resolves to save his friends from pain by rushing into the self-sacrifice of suicide, as the less dreadful evil of the two. Can it be wondered at that, even with strong minds, continued mental torture should end in insanity?

Nor are the British Isles the only country in which social brigands hunt after prey. In France, they have a special name, "chanteurs," and the exercise of their profession is known as "chantage." Canler, ancien chef du service de sûreté, of the French police, quietly tells us, in his repulsive *Memoires*, that he knew in Paris at least fifteen of those gentry, who carried on their trade for many years with great success, without the police being able to touch them. The reason of their apparent impunity is plain: nobody dared to complain of their proceedings. Nevertheless, the authorities managed, with difficulty, to get together some amount of evidence, and a few "chanteurs" were sent to adorn the prisons with their presence. At the time of Canler's writing (1862), four ex-chan-

teurs were living in Paris, in very easy circumstances. The first, formerly secretary to a commissaire de police, had got together a fortune of four hundred a year. The second lived in the Champs-Élysées; he possessed pictures worth more than a hundred thousand francs, and a country chateau in the Touraine. The third, owning property near the Barrière de Courcelles, led the life of a respectable independent gentleman, and was highly esteemed by all the neighbourhood, who were ignorant of his antecedents. The fourth was also exceedingly well off. All of them, after feathering their nests, had bid adieu to their brigandage, and were sheltering, under the cover of an irreproachable conduct, the produce of a course of vile machinations and shameful frauds.

A favourite branch of "chantage" in France is the pillage of those unfortunate men who, having sinned against honesty on one occasion only, and expiated their fault in prison, strive to lead a life of probity and to merit sympathy, if not respect. Chanteurs of this class have almost all taken rank in the bagne, and their conscience has long been seared by habits of crime. They carefully search out some former prison-companion, who would be ruined in the eyes of the world by the simple fact of having suffered imprisonment, but who is endeavouring hard to return to society and to obtain a subsistence by honest labour. Once found, they fasten on him as an old acquaintance, and the work of brigandage begins.

One day, there stepped into Canler's bureau a good-looking man, respectably dressed, who said: "Monsieur, my name is H. I am the owner of an establishment which is growing more and more prosperous every day. I am happily married, and the father of two dear children. In short, monsieur, for several years past I have enjoyed almost perfect happiness, when a wretch came and robbed me of all my joys and destroyed every hope for the future. I must state"—blushing crimson with shame—"that, fifteen years ago, I was tried for a mercantile forgery, and for that criminal act, committed in a moment of madness, I was sentenced to five years of penal servitude. I underwent my punishment in the midst of the ignoble beings by whom bagnes are filled. It was through seeing them every day, and hearing their conversation, that I felt the full enormity of my fault: and I resolved to retrieve it, at the expiration of my sentence, by an

industrious and honourable life. Heaven seemed to bless my repentance. Once free, I came to Paris, where I was not known. By hard work I succeeded in establishing myself in a small way of business. It was then that I married a charming woman, who, as well as her family, is ignorant of my past misconduct, and who every day exhorts her children to imitate their father's example."

Here the poor man, overcome by his feelings, was obliged to pause in his narrative. He soon continued: "I believed that the expiation had been in proportion to the fault, and that I should be permitted to enjoy a little repose, when a wretch named B. met me, about eighteen months ago. I recognised him as having been at the *bagne* at the same time as myself. He came to my house, congratulated me on my good fortune, and obtained information respecting my circumstances. Two days afterwards, he presented himself again, under the pretext of borrowing fifty francs, which I dared not refuse him, for he could ruin me with a single word. A few days afterwards, he came for a hundred francs, stating that he wanted it to meet a bill. And then he made fresh demands of successively more exorbitant sums, enforcing them all by the threat of exposing me to my newly acquired family and connexions. He has already extorted from me more than six thousand francs: if this goes on, I shall soon be ruined. Consequently, monsieur, I determined, happen what may, to put myself in your hands, and beg you to protect me from this villain."

"But," asked Canler, "have you never tried to make B. understand how infamous his conduct is?"

"Often, monsieur; but whenever I tell him he is ruining me, he answers, 'Bah! bah! All stuff and rubbish! You must shell out, or else I will tell everybody, everywhere, that you are nothing but a galley-slave!'"

He wept bitterly as he concluded his story. Canler comforted him as well as he could, and dismissed him with the promise that he would personally attend to his affair. Next day, by Canler's orders, B. was arrested by two agents of police, and brought to the bureau. There, after a lecture on his baseness, for which he, probably, did not care a pin, he was served with an order of the prefect of police, expelling him for life from the capital. The complainant, from that moment, was troubled no more, and his family were never

pained by the threatened revelation. Unfortunately, not every one who falls a prey to brigands can call forth a *Deus ex machinâ*, a *chef de sureté*, or an irresponsible *préfet de police*, to rescue him.

How, then, can the schemes and stratagems of brigands of society be baffled and defied? The answer is so plain that it becomes almost a stupid truism. If everybody was always circumspect, straightforward, self-denying, sinless; if nobody was ever unwary, weak, foolish, dishonest, immoral, wicked; if nobody thought of tempting others, and nobody dreamt of courting temptation; if nobody ever laid traps for others, even if anybody would fall into a trap, if laid; if a few other grand alterations could be made, why then—why then, indeed, the world would be a very different sort of world from what it is.

MISS PONSONBY'S COMPANION.

IN TWELVE CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER III. THE INVISIBLE THIEF.

It is not a pleasant thing, it may be conceded, to lose a ten-pound note; but still there are various ways of behaving under such a calamity. If you cannot, after such a deprivation, evoke a sardonic smile, at least assume a decorous dignity. A miserable joke or an apposite proverb will carry off the thing much better than a hang-dog silence, which at once marks you as an immediate object for the most humiliating pity at the hand of a man's worst and most aggressive enemies—his second-hand friends. A certain dismal consolation, too, may be by some persons derived by the crescendo process, as thus: the fellow is a rascal, say, and I confess I should like to fit him with Luke's iron crown, having first stretched him carefully out on Damien's bed of steel; but still I have much to be grateful for in the fact that the scamp did not take my twenty-pound note, my four-post bed, or my cellar of wine, or my wife, or, in fact, if that's all, my life. Philosophy, cosey in its snug arm-chair, has devised many such cataplasms for human ills; has often shown, indeed, that money is a mere phantasma, and proved a thousand times that there is no such thing as pain; and yet the idiotic world will go on nevertheless scraping together gold, and screaming out when it is hurt.

In the present instance, Miss Ponsonby was far too distracted at her loss to think of posing herself in any philosophical attitudes of sham resignation. The loss so vexed and alarmed her, so fretted her brain, and wrung her thrifty heart, that she was, for the moment, indifferent to all appearances. A lady by birth and education as she was, if she had been well enough at that moment, she would have run right away down Crampton High-street, like Molière's Avare, screaming, "Thieves! thieves! I've lost a ten-pound note!" Even now, weak and worn as she was, she could not contain herself, although in the presence of the new doctor. She stood there, tottering, at the head of the stairs, clinging to the banisters like a broken-down Cassandra, an old Lady Macbeth, at the last gasp, or a dilapidated Banshee, proclaiming the emigration of the old family, and the consequent close of her ghostly engagement. Each and all of these characters did the distracted old lady of fortune alternately resemble. Miss Dampier flew up-stairs, swift as a bird, and before Mercy or Mr. Tresham could run to her aid, caught her aunt in her arms just as she was in the very act of falling faint and exhausted at the stair-head. In a moment, however, the young doctor had released her of the burden, and with two or three prompt, yet soothing words, assured her that there was no danger. The three then lifted the inconsolable old lady carefully into her sanctum, a snug little room adjoining her bedroom, where some black profile portraits, cut out with the scissors, hung in oval frames over the mantel-piece, and an old-fashioned bureau, open, and strewn with papers, stood up in a corner by one of the windows.

"Dear, dear aunt," said Lilly Dampier, kneeling beside the almost delirious old lady, and stroking her thin, cold hands, "what is it you have lost? Where was it? No doubt it is all safe. There's no one been here to-day, except I and Mercy. Has there, Mercy?"

"Not as I know on," said that person; "no one at least that I've set my eyes upon, but there's been the works of darkness here somehow. The Lord deliver us!"

"I'll have justice," said the old lady, recovering as if by a violent effort, and gasping out every word as if on the verge of a fainting fit. "Lilly, I will find that note. Let me go now." And, as she spoke, Miss Ponsonby chided and almost shook Lilly in the passion of the moment,

as if she was grappling, in her feeble way, with the thief himself.

"My dear madam," said the young doctor, sharply and quickly, "pray calm yourself. You seem weak; you breathe with difficulty, and to give way to this excitement is injurious to you in the highest degree." Then he turned to Mercy, and said, in a stern, prompt way: "Have you any sal-volatile in the house? If so, run directly for the bottle and bring it, and a wine-glass, and some cold water. If you have no sal-volatile, get some brandy. We must give a restorative at once. Don't stand there repeating texts that don't the least apply, but go quick."

Almost immediately that Miss Ponsonby had drank the glass of opaline liquid, she seemed to suddenly grow stronger and calmer. She even tottered, with Lilly's help, to the bureau, to show her where she had left the ten-pound note, with some others, the night before. Then she suddenly relapsed for a moment into hysterical tears, faint screams, cries for justice, and denunciations of felonious persons in general, with a violence of feeling, as Tresham began quickly to think, quite out of all reasonable and sane proportion to the extent of the loss. But he took a wide and generous view of the matter, and concluded that the rich old maid was probably not so much lamenting the mere ten pounds as regretting the loss of confidence it would produce and the detracting views of human nature it would encourage. But he took far too liberal an estimate of that contracted, selfish, and acidulated mind.

"Mr. Tresham," she said, her pride sobering her as she grew more composed, "I am sorry you see me for the first time in such a state of vexation and excitement, but this loss is really most extraordinary and unaccountable. I had the money last night. I left it there on my desk, and when I left the room Lilly locked the door for me, and gave me the key as usual. To-day I get up and go in, and two hours after I miss this ten-pound note; some one's robbed me. You locked the door, last night, did you not, Lilly?"

"Oh, yes, aunt."

"It is very unaccountable," said Tresham, after a moment's thought; "very. Are there no workpeople or charwomen about the house who might have been tempted by this money?"

"I really don't know, Mr. Tresham," said Miss Ponsonby. "I have had no reason before—but—well, one doesn't know

whom to trust in a place like this. I have never yet found out our present charwoman in any act of dishonesty, but there's no knowing."

"Oh, aunt, dear," said Miss Dampier, "you could not suspect that good, nice Mrs. Lawford? She's so industrious and respectful, and I have never seen her upstairs, except when she was scouring the spare room."

"My dear, you don't know the world," said her aunt. "Dishonest persons, as Mr. Tresham will tell you, are often plausible enough."

"But, dear aunt, I was by your side talking till you fell asleep, and no one entered the room afterwards till you called."

"You ought not to have left me. If you had not left me this would not have happened." Miss Ponsonby uttered this complaint with the fretfulness of an invalid, and a good deal of that tyranny that rich patronesses sometimes exercise towards their protégés.

Tresham was quick to the rescue. Instinctively he seemed to shrink from hearing his patient assume a tone of authority and querulous complaint towards Miss Dampier. Feeling Miss Ponsonby's pulse, he said, "Yes, the sal-volatile has done you good. I should strongly advise you now to go to bed. This excitement and talking is very injurious to you, and may 'set up' a state of the throat and chest that would keep you awake half the night. Miss Dampier, you must plead with me."

At that moment the door flew open, and in ran Susan, the pretty little maid-servant, very red with running, her bonnet on hind-part before, and the pound of arrowroot in her hand. Finding nobody down-stairs on her return, the girl, fearing something had happened, had run up to see where everybody was. She drew back on seeing a stranger.

"You never came for my letter for the four o'clock post, Susan," said Miss Ponsonby. "You positively are the most careless girl that ever was known. You really seem to have no head—no head at all. There, give Mercy the arrowroot and go."

Susan seemed heedless of these generalised accusations, and gave the arrowroot to the time-server Mercy, who nudged and muttered a rebuke, from which Susan, a strong, sturdy girl, broke forth, and pushed again to the front, being frank, bold, and unencumbered with any Oriental ideas of obedience.

"But if you please, mum—yes I will,

Mercy—if you please 'm, I did come, but you were asleep, and I did not desire to wake you, mum, so I took the letter off the desk just where I seed it when you told me when I brought the beef-ten. I put it into the post by the baker's, mum, and the postman came up just then, and told me it was all right. Yes I will, Mercy. I've done nothing to be ashamed of, and I will."

It was natural that Tresham and Miss Dampier should smile at the little maid's fervid explanation and Mercy's indignation at her self-justification, for the by-play was worthy of Wilkie's pencil.

"Come here, come here, girl," said Miss Ponsonby, sternly, from the old-fashioned round-backed arm-chair by the door, into which she had sunk.

Susan approached, half frightened, and the moment she was in reach the old lady's thin hand flew at her, and gripped her convulsively by the arm.

"It was she took it," she screamed; "this Susan stole it—this was the girl—stole it when I was asleep. Call the police! Don't let her escape! Lock the doors! I will have my ten pounds. Give me the ten pounds."

"I am sure Susan would not steal anything," said Miss Dampier. "Dear aunt, do control yourself. Mr. Tresham, isn't her head perhaps wandering? You would not for the world, would you, Susan?"

"I could wager my word, Miss Ponsonby," said Tresham, "that this girl is no thief."

Before Susan could recover her astonishment sufficiently, the door again flew open, and in bounced a good-looking, stout, active charwoman, with a wet scrubbing-brush and flannel in one hand and a piece of soap in the other.

"What's all this, I should like to know, about my Susan?" she said, in a tone of almost aggressive protest, as she made a dash at Susan, and carried her by a coup de main. "Beg your pardon, madam and miss, but I happened to be going up-stairs with my pail, and I heard Miss Ponsonby cry out that my Susan had stolen ten pounds, which, I say, is an onpossible thing, for my Susan's been well brought up, though we are poor people, as you may say, and she would never go for to do it. Only just look at her now. You can see she don't even know what you mean. Rich people mislay their money, and then go and lay it to the charge of poor girls, whose character is all they have to

depend upon. So you'll please take a month's notice from my Susan from this day, mum."

In the midst of this scene—for the flood of the honest woman's indignation was not easily stopped—Mr. Tresham, promising to send some composing medicine, quietly took his leave. The last person's face on whom his eyes rested in that room was not, you may depend upon it, that of Miss Ponsonby. Miss Dampier having bowed to him, did not turn again as he left. She was intent on tranquillising her aunt and pleading for Susan. Why should he have cared for that? Yet he did. Talk of woman's vanity!—but as he was a man, I must be merciful to him.

As he passed through the hall the doctor looked into the parlour, where the phantom of Miss Ponsonby's pretty companion still sat by the fire, now sunk low and smouldering, to call and rebuke Dandy, who was scratching with mistaken zeal at the parlour wainscot for a purely ideal rat—in fact, the ghost of the one that escaped in the yard from George's broom. A dash Dandy made at some white object on the hearth-rug, which he tossed about in absurd fury, and eventually wound madly round his body, drew the doctor's attention to three or four little dark specks on the carpet, which he stooped and picked up. They were violets that had been dropped by Lilly when she was filling the cluster of five little white parian Greek vases, which stood in the centre of the round table. The object that so teased, distracted, and delighted Dandy was the strip cut off one of the white frills that stood up like shirt-collars round the little flowers that had been deluded into mistaking October for April. Man, especially young man, as has been often observed, is a strange, irrational animal, else why should the young doctor have kissed the stray violets and then thrust them hastily into his waistcoat-pocket with as guilty an air as if he had committed felony. No doubt the mysterious thief, whoever he might be, who had purloined Miss Ponsonby's ten pounds, had been twice as bold in his abstraction. Yet, after all, what harm in keeping the violets in remembrance of a pretty and interesting face that he might not see more than once or twice again? None, of course, that was the utter absurdity of it; and why did a big man like that blush as he whistled for Dandy, let himself out, and slammed the black, heavy-panelled door after him as quietly as it would let him?

The same moon, but now clear and keen as a golden sickle. The wind was fresher, and was busy sweeping the sky free of cloud. Even the two sour spinster trees looked more cheerful, and were whispering together in a low voice, and nodding their heads at the same moment like half-sleepy gossips at "the latter end of a sea-coal fire." A fanciful person might have almost supposed that, as friends of the family, they were discussing together the loss of Miss Ponsonby's ten pounds. The old bay-trees guarding the steps, standing as much on their respectability as ever, and with leaves glittering like silver, rustled in their stiff, old-fashioned way as Frank Tresham passed, as if to wish him a good evening. It was evidently meant well, and so Frank took it. As he walked home he thought over the mysterious robbery, and in his mind at once acquitted the little servant-girl. "If burglars ever carry off that amiable old lady's plate-chest," he thought to himself, "I believe she would go stark staring mad. I have seen many odd faces in my time," he went on in his reverie, "but I never saw anything odder than the look that detestable lady's-maid gave me when she described Gumboge's medicine. I should almost have imagined she was fond of laudanum herself. I don't like that woman—wonder if *she* collared the ten-pound note? Not unlikely, repeated a text the next moment perhaps, and will give sixpence on Sunday at the chapel to the Timbuctoo mission." That pretty niece, too, he thought, was, after all, the very companion that he had sketched in such odious colours. But just then a singular phenomenon disturbed Frank Tresham's reverie, for out of one of those deep blue spaces in the sky the moon suddenly launched forth, and in the glory of the thin cloud into which it sailed there appeared for a moment a face as like Lilly Dampier's as two peas. An instant after the same vision reappeared in the moonlight that gleamed out on a garden wall. After all, it was a pleasant spectre by which to be temporarily haunted.

When Frank got home the pheasant was still warm, but it was only a wreck of its former greatness. Such are the sacrifices which life demands of us. Nevertheless, our hero ate nearly all the bird without a grumble, for he was young and enupestic, and the beautiful and beatific vision had by no means taken away his appetite. Afterwards he lit his pipe, put his feet on the hob, and looked at those violets which he had picked up on Miss Ponsonby's hearth-

rug, but he did not throw them into the fire.

CHAPTER IV. THE EARWIG.

"THE Whole Duty of Man" is a very admirable theological work, but when it comes to reading it two hours together in a hot room, it is perhaps apt to produce in the reader a longing for fresh air, and any sunshine there may be about.

"Oh, I am so tired, Mercy, of reading," said Lilly, the forenoon after the robbery, as she ran into the parlour where Mercy was dusting. Lilly looked as buoyant and beautiful as if she had been among May flowers all the morning; "it's very wicked of me I know, but that Duty of Man is so much alike, I always seem reading the same page."

"To me, miss, it seems always very beautiful, and very 'oly. 'Ours and 'ours I used to sit reading it to poor dear Mrs. Baldock, who is now a saint, if there ever was a saint. The very gown I wear now, Miss Lilly, was hers. Ah! that was a loss. She was always giving. Ah! if there was only more like her this would be a very different world."

A good deal of Mercy's conversation consisted of groans and ejaculations, unless she was scolding or running any one down, then and then alone she kept strictly to business. With some sort of respect for Mercy's fidelity, this lugubrious tone did not harmonise with Lilly's disposition that bright morning, and she laughed out from very merriment of heart, and with shameful indifference to the merits of the late lamented Mrs. Baldock. Mercy gave a sanctimonious sigh, lamenting that youth and happiness should be allowed to outrage the world in their momentary forgetfulness of death and misery.

"Ah! you're very young, miss," she said; "and you haven't found yet that everything is vanity. It would be better for you if you had—much better, but then *some* people can't abide good things or good people, and this world's their idol and always will be."

"My idols, just now, are sunshine, liberty, and happiness, Mercy. The religion I was taught makes people happy, and they don't hate the sunshine because it is not so gloomy as their own minds. I dare say you think I'm wicked because I don't always play hymn tunes, and because I enjoy dancing. Did you ever dance, Mercy?"

Mercy groaned, said she hoped she never

had, and implied that such rhythmical gymnastics were only fit for lost persons, who were visibly going very much downwards—very much so.

Lilly laughed louder than ever at this outburst, and, as she did so, chirped to a pet goldfinch in a cage by the window, whom she called Goldy, and fed with a lump of sugar, placed between two of the prettiest cherry lips in the world. Just then Miss Ponsonby's bell rang sharply and fretfully.

"There she is again," said Mercy, by no means in a tone of Christian patience—"ring, ring, ring—nothing but ring. Ah, Miss Lilly, I sometimes think it would be a mercy if *missus* was taken."

"Oh, Mercy, how very wicked of you!"

"You know you think so too, Miss Dampier, only you don't like to say so."

"What, lose dear aunt? No; I love her too much."

"Dear aunt!" said Mercy, scornfully, with the tone of a reproachful accomplice; "who makes a slave of you, and keeps you here in a sort of prison, and scolds and fidgets you about all day. I say again, it will be a blessed day when the black coach comes for her."

"Don't smile like that, Mercy; you look quite cruel. What's the matter with you, Mercy, this morning? No wonder you don't like hearing me laugh, or seeing me happy. You're put out to-day. I never heard you talk like this before. You used to be always praising aunt."

"I only did that because you did so. I'm worn out with her lately. Who can like being called up before daybreak, and watched and nagged at? It is too much for flesh and blood to bear. I know it's sinful not to bear wot's good for us. There she is again. There, let her ring. I only wish she had to wait on herself for a day. That'd teach her. But it's all my wicked, unregenerate temper, Miss Lilly, I know, and you mustn't think anything of it. It's a trial; but it's good for me, no doubt, and I'll try and think so."

Thus the odious woman, finding the sudden removal of her mask had disgusted Lilly, who had none to withdraw, slipped it clumsily on again.

"I've only an hour to be away, Mercy," said Lilly, "and I mustn't stop talking any longer, for I'm squandering my sunshine. Mind aunt has her boiled chicken exactly at one." And Lilly ran off singing, rather shocked at the contrast between Mercy's real and assumed manner.

"I'll see to it," said Mercy, her sallow eyes turning yellow, as Lilly's mauve locket-ribbon fluttered round the corner of the passage that led into the garden, "and I'll see that I put a spoke in your wheel, too, carnying and wheedling to get missus's money, and to rob me of what I might have had. Well, I know I am down in her will, and that's a blessed comfort, after sore trials and heavy burdens, almost heavier than one can bear. Smooth-faced, wheedling minx! despising sound doctrine, and turning up her nose at me. I'll teach her. There the old cat is, worretting again at the bell. Ugh! I wish I'd the mixing of her medicine."

And full of bitter resolves, Mercy went, with her face set to do evil, to pour some leprous distilment in her mistress's ear. The old lady was sitting at her desk, feebly turning over a bundle of faded-looking letters, tied round with pale ribbon, that had once been blue.

"No one attends to me," she said, querulously. "I've been ringing the bell for full half an hour. Here I am left alone, and I suppose if I was found dead up here no one but you, Mercy, would give me even a thought. Ah! what it is to be old!"

"I told Miss Lilly it was very unfeeling of her to go running out and leaving you all alone, but she doesn't care, she said, so high and mighty as you like; she wasn't going to be locked up all day in a house that was like a jail. I'm afraid, ma'am, Miss Dampier isn't as contented as when she first came."

"But she *must* be contented, and she *shall* be contented," said the old lady, sharply, poking the fire with angry petulance; "beggars mustn't be choosers. She must do as I like. I'll not be ruled by a chit like her. Did I not give her a home when no one else would?"

"You are always kind, and so I told her, and it's her duty to do all she can, and to sacrifice her small likings, and to turn away from worldly pleasures that signify nothing; but these young people, brought into better circumstances than they have a right to expect, forget all that, and telling them does no kind of good."

"And what did the inspector say this morning?"—the old lady did not choose to enter further into her feelings about

Lilly—"did he think any one had got in by the back windows?"

"No, ma'am; he said there were no foot-prints on the flower-bed, and he thought it must have been done by some one in the house—some work-person who knew the way, or some——"

"Some what? Why don't you speak out?" broke forth the irritable old lady, "standing there screwing up your eyes and mouth as if you were keeping something back. What did the man say? I don't want texts and jargon from your chapel sermons. What did he say? You have been a faithful servant to me, Mercy, for now ten years, and you know I have not forgotten you in my will. You are bound to keep no secrets from me. Did you ask him to search Susan's box?"

"Yes, ma'am, but he refused; he said there was no case against Susan at present. If she was found in a week or so to dress finer, or have any lover who had been seen about the place, then it would be different. He would have his eye on her, he said, but he believed from what he saw there was no harm at all in the girl. If the mother, he said, hadn't such a high character, he might have suspected her. Altogether, he said it was a matter he would not like to give any opinion upon for the present."

"Mercy, you are equivocating; you are not telling me the whole truth. You said this man told you he thought the robbery must have been done by some one in the house or some—— My memory, you see, is very good. What did you mean?"

Mercy was silent for a moment. Then her malign eyes fell on Lilly's work-basket, brimming with coloured wools, that lay on the table by the fire. "If you please, ma'am, I'd rather not say—perhaps I misunderstood him—you'd better see him yourself."

"What *does* the woman mean?" thought Miss Ponsonby. "She is faithful I know." Then a horrible suspicion flashed through her mind.

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